



## LESSON PLAN: Role of the Ghettos – The Lodz Ghetto as a Case Study

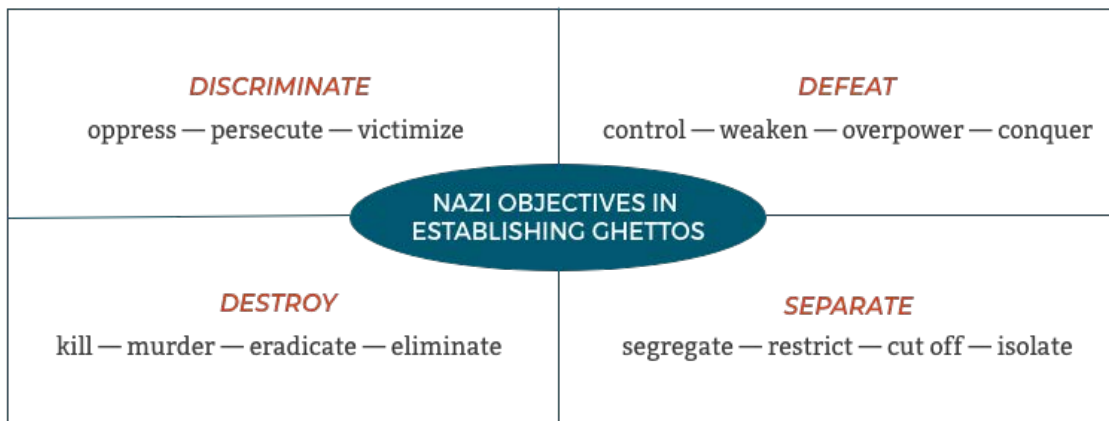
### INTRODUCTION

In this lesson students investigate the ways in which the Nazis used ghettos to control, isolate, and weaken the Jewish population. They also consider how Jews responded to this oppression and sought to maintain their humanity in the face of severe brutality. Students focus on the Lodz Ghetto in Poland as a case study. They analyze an informational text as well as primary source documents – including diary entries, poems, and testimonies – from Lodz residents.<sup>1</sup>

### PART 1: WHAT METHODS DID THE NAZIS USE IN THE GHETTOS TO SYSTEMATICALLY DEHUMANIZE JEWISH PEOPLE?

Post the supporting question above for students as you begin this part of the lesson.

**1** Based on their understanding from the first lesson, students write one word on a sticky note that they think best reflects the objectives of the Nazis in establishing ghettos. They post their notes on the board. The class works together to organize the notes by theme into a concept map and to discuss the significance of each theme. For example:



**2** Students learn that they will focus on one ghetto in this lesson as a case study – the Lodz ghetto in Poland – and that they will apply three themes as they investigate: *control*, *isolate*, and *weaken*. These terms, reflecting core Nazi objectives, are clarified as needed. Students collaborate to create symbols that represent each, which will be used throughout the lesson as they examine sources.

<sup>1</sup> This lesson uses the Lodz ghetto as a way to tell a larger story. While each ghetto was unique, this lesson uses Lodz as a prism to try and understand why the Nazis confined Jewish people in such an inhumane manner, what methods were used to control them, and how Jewish people responded to the brutality. What happened in Lodz and the decisions made by people who established the ghetto shed light on larger decisions that were being made elsewhere, even though the Lodz ghetto had its own uniqueness and special historical circumstances.

*OPTION: Students choose three terms from among those they generated in the concept map exercise to use throughout the lesson; the terms track closely with the core themes of control, isolate, and weaken.*

**3** Students watch testimony clips from individuals who discuss how conditions in the Lodz Ghetto grew dire after confinement there: **Milton Belfer (bio)** and **George Shainfarber (bio)**. As they watch the clips, students take notes on the handout, *Testimony Reflections*, found at the beginning of this unit. They reflect on the themes of control, isolate, and weaken, and use the symbols they created to annotate their observations.

**4** After viewing the testimony clips, students journal and/or participate in a whole group discussion in response to some of the following questions:

- How did the Nazis control, isolate, and weaken the Jewish population in the ghettos?
- According to Milton Belfer, what means did the German soldiers use to confine and instill fear in the Jewish population of the ghetto?
- What role did food – especially bread – play in George Shainfarber’s experience in the ghetto? How were families affected by competition over food?
- How do you think Milton and George felt sharing these memories? How did you feel listening to them?

**5** Individually or in pairs, students read *The Lodz Ghetto* handout. They use different colored highlighters to underscore the lesson themes (control, isolate, weaken) and add the symbols they created where relevant. They annotate the handout with their thoughts and questions about ghetto life.

**6** As a class, students report back on their findings regarding ways in which the Nazis controlled, isolated, and weakened the Jews of the Lodz ghetto. They discuss some of the following questions, citing evidence from the text to support their responses:

- Why were the city inhabitants especially hostile to Jews in the Lodz ghetto? What challenges did this present?
- How did the Nazis set up the *Judenrat* to intentionally create tension? What were the effects?
- Why did Chaim Rumkowski encourage ghetto residents (including children) to work in factories? Do you think his “salvation through labor” approach was understandable based upon what was known at the time? Why?
- The text says, “The struggle for survival was a daily, uphill battle.” What examples of this struggle most struck you?
- How did the Jews of the Lodz ghetto preserve their previous ways of life and “create meaning in the hopeless ghetto reality”? What does this say about their spirit and outlook?

## **PART 2: HOW DID THE JEWISH PEOPLE RESPOND TO THE BRUTALITY OF THE GHETTOS?**

*Post the supporting question above for students as you begin this part of the lesson.*

**7** Students watch testimony clips from individuals who reflect on scarcity and being forced to work as children in the Lodz Ghetto: **George Shainfarber (bio)** and **Eva Safferman (bio)**. As they watch the clips, students take notes on the handout, *Testimony Reflections*, found at the beginning of this unit. They reflect on the themes of control, isolate, and weaken, and use the symbols they created to annotate their observations.

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After viewing the testimony clips, students journal and/or participate in a whole group discussion in response to some of the following questions:

- What additional examples did you notice about how the Nazis controlled, isolated, and weakened the Jewish population in the ghettos?
- Why did George Shainfarber and Eva Safferman – at ages 12 and 11 – have to give up school for work? How do you think this affected them physically and emotionally?
- What role did scarcity play in George’s life and the lives of others in the ghetto? How did George’s mother and other families try to cope with the conditions in the ghetto?
- Eva describes her narrow escape from a Nazi soldier. What do you think was the emotional toll of living in constant fear of being taken away? How does Eva’s story relate to Ellis Lewin’s comments about being constantly kept inside and Joseph Morton’s reflection on always living in fear?

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<sup>2</sup>The handout, *Excerpts from the Diary of Dawid Sierakowiak*, is distributed and the class reads the introduction together. Individually or in pairs, students read and annotate the excerpts, highlighting ideas related to the themes of control, isolate, and weaken and adding symbols where relevant. In addition, students reflect on other themes explored throughout the unit, including education, hunger, despair, and hope. In small groups, students share their reactions to the diary excerpts and participate in “The Last Word” exercise as follows:

- Each group member independently selects one sentence or brief passage from the diary entries that they found particularly meaningful.
- The first group member reads their sentence aloud and the other members alternately describe why they think their peer chose that particular piece. The reader goes last, explaining their choice (they have the LAST WORD).
- The process repeats until all group members have had a chance to share their sentences.

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As a class, students discuss some of the following questions about Dawid Sierakowiak’s diary entries and support their responses using specific references to the text.

- What did going to school mean to Dawid? What role did education play in the lives of children in the ghetto?
- What is your reaction to Dawid’s observation, “Humiliation inflicted by force does not humiliate”?
- Dawid wrote, “long live humor.” How did he exhibit humor in his diary? How do you think it is possible for people to keep a sense of humor during unthinkably difficult times?
- What are things that many young people take for granted, but young people in the ghetto learned to cherish?
- What adult roles did children in the ghetto have to take on? How do you think this affected families?
- Dawid expressed both hope and despair in his diary. What specific events caused him to feel one way or the other? Did you notice any patterns in his outlook as time progressed from 1939 to 1943?
- Do you think keeping a diary was an act of resistance for young people in the ghettos? Do you think Dawid would have viewed his diary in this way? Explain your thinking.

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<sup>2</sup> If time is limited, the following excerpts are recommended: September 3, 1939; September 10, 1939, September 24, 1939; October 4, 1939; April 27, 1941; May 2, 1941; May 16, 1941; September 5, 1942; April 4, 1943



<sup>3</sup>As a summative task, students respond to one of the following poems: ***Poem by an Unknown Girl*** or ***Poem by Avraham Koplwicz***. The poems and background information are read together as a class, and students identify the differences in tone and outlook between the poems (e.g., past vs. future orientation, limited vs. limitless view of time, literal vs. figurative language, despairing vs. hopeful feeling). Students write about one poem using the following prompt to guide their work:

*Choose one poem. Write at least a paragraph in which you describe the poet's outlook and why you think she or he may have wanted to express these particular feelings. Consider what you have learned about the experiences of Jews in the ghettos. Support your response with specific words or phrases from the poem and at least two facts from lesson sources that serve as evidence for your ideas.*

ESTIMATED COMPLETION TIME: 120 - 150 MINUTES

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<sup>3</sup> To learn more about cultural and spiritual resistance in the ghettos, see the Jewish Resistance unit.